DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 186 104 PS 011 365

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TITLE	Raising a New Generation in the South: A Preliminary Report.
INSTITUTION	Southern Growth Policies Board, Research Triangle Park, N.C.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Nov 79
GRANT	90-TW-2026
NOTE	18p.
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adolescents: Adults: *Children: *Demography: *Educational Attainment: Family Characteristics: Infant Mortality: Medical Services: *Regional Characteristics: *Welfare Services
IDENTIFIERS	*United States (South)

ABSTRACT

This brief, preliminary report sets forth in broad strokes a profile of children in the South. Demographic, educational, and program resources data are provided. The report is considered a beginning step in the process of developing baseline data about the unique characteristics of Southern children. Three themes are evident in the report: (1) improvement in health, education and economic conditions has occurred, (2) unique problems requiring continuing action remain, and (3) many questions about how well public policies and resources match the unique needs of Southern children have yet to be answered. Data reported usually represent a 14 state area, including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. (Author/RH)

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RAISING A NEW GENERATION IN THE SOUTH

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RAISING A NEW GENERATION IN THE SOUTH

A PRELIMINARY REPORT
November 1979

SOUTHERN GROWTH POLICIES BOARD

Box 12293
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PS 011365

APR 17 1980

This report was supported by the U S Department of Health, Education and Welfare, under grant number 90-TW-2026 The content of this report and the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

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INTRODUCTION

This preliminary report sets forth in broad strokes a profile of children in the South. It is not intended as a comprehensive or definitive statement. Rather, it is a beginning step in the process of developing baseline data about the unique characteristics of southern children. We hope it will be useful to the individual states, and to the region as a whole in evaluating existing programs, in setting priorities and in planning future programs.

We want to review some initial observations about children in the South. What do the widely scattered statistical sources tell us about these children? How many children live in the South? What family settings prevail? What can be said about indicators or risk, or indicators of service needs? How are some major public programs responding to the needs of southern children? In addition, we pose some questions that simply cannot be answered by existing data sources. We want to begin to identify the gaps in our information about these children.

Policy makers concerned about children in the South will notice three themes throughout the data:

(1) **Trends** — Improving trends are evident in the health, education and economic facts of life of southern children.

(2) **Problems** — Unique problems, some new, some lingering from earlier days, require continued action to improve conditions for southern children.

(3) **Questions** — A myriad of questions arise about how well public policies and resources match the unique needs of southern children.

ABOUT THE DATA . . .

Facts and figures presented in this report have been culled from a variety of sources. Unfortunately, there is considerable lack of uniformity among agencies in even the most basic definitions. For instance some agencies count as children those individuals under 21 years of age while other agencies count only those under age 18. Although we are reporting the most recent data available to us, not all items are available for identical years. Finally, much of the data reported is based on survey samples and is subject to the statistical caveats regarding sampling error and variability. Given the number and variety of agencies gathering information about children, the data is by nature eclectic.

DEFINING THE REGION

The Southern Growth Policies Board (SGPB) Children's Project encompasses 14 southern states* and Puerto Rico. Unfortunately, uniform data about Puerto Rico is lacking, therefore data labeled "South" represents only the 14-state area. In some instances regional data has been labeled "Census South" which signifies our 14-state South plus Maryland, the District of Columbia and Delaware.

THE SOUTH'S YOUNG POPULATION

The population in the South is a bit younger than the rest of the country. While the median age of the U.S. population has increased by almost two years during the decade of the seventies, the median age of most southern states is below the national median.

The 19.4 million southern children under age 18 constitute a slightly larger proportion of the total southern population — 31% — than do children in other regions.

Very young children, under age 5, account for 7.6% of the population of the South and 6.8% of the non-South population.

The birth rate in the South continues to be higher than in other regions. Although birth rates between 1970 and 1975 declined nationally and regionally, signs of a change in this trend were apparent in 1976 and 1977.

In addition to the natural increase in the child population, migration also contributes to the South's more youthful community. Migrants to the South generally tend to be young adults with growing families. In the period 1970-75 migration caused southern states to experience increases in the school age population ranging from 1.4% to 17.0%.

SOUTHERN CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

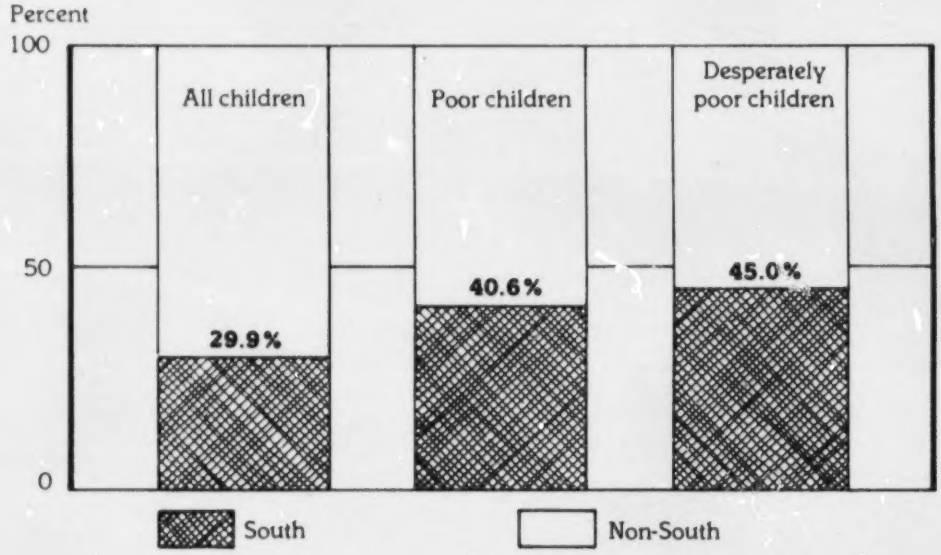
The vast majority of children grow up in families. In the South 80.2% of the children live with both mother and father. Although most children nationally continue to live in two-parent families, the proportion of children in single parent families has grown since 1970. In the Census South in 1975 the proportion of children in single parent families was slightly higher than the U.S. rate: 19.8% of southern children were with single parents; 16.7% of U.S. children were in similar circumstances. (Unpublished data: 1976 Survey of Income and Education).

*Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia

There is little doubt that kinship ties are strong in the South. More southern families live within walking distance to a number of relatives than in any other region of the country.

The economic circumstances of families have a significant impact on the opportunities and protections afforded southern children. It is disturbing to observe that southern children bear a disproportionate burden of U.S. poverty. While the South is home to 30% of the nation's children, 40% of all poor children live here. Among the very poor the rates are even higher. Forty-five percent of all children in families below 75% of the poverty level live in the South.

Children by Family Income Level, 1975



While almost four million children live in poverty in the South, the number and proportion of children in poor families has declined since 1969. However, the poverty rate for pre-school age children remains unchanged with almost one million southern children under age 5 living in poor families. The overall poverty rate among U.S. children outside the South is 13% compared to 21% for the South.

Information about the quality of housing provides another dimension to the poor economic status of many southern families. For instance, 13% of "white dwelling units" and 32.1% of "black dwelling units" in the Census South lacked some or all plumbing facilities at the time of the 1970 Census, while the same lack was noted in only 3.2% of the white units and in only 4.8% of the black units in the non-South.

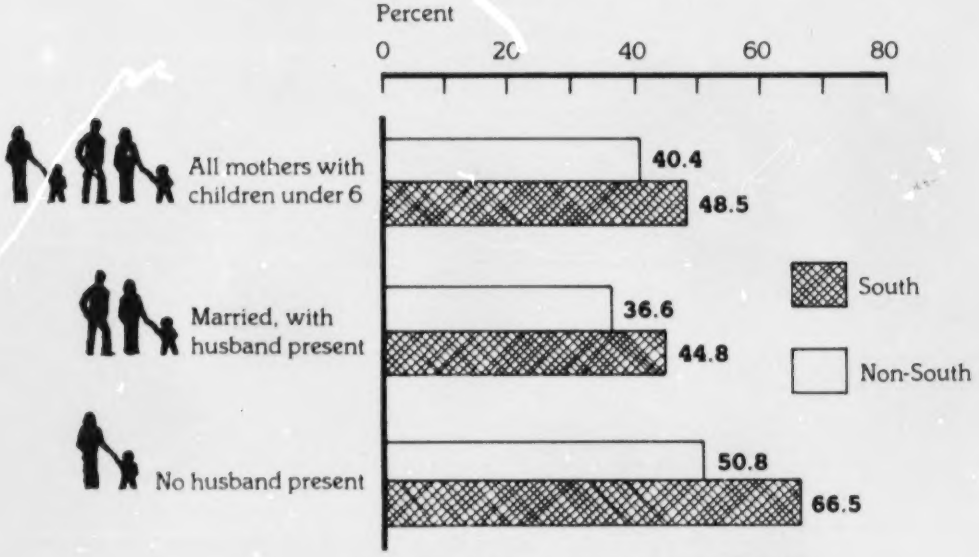
MOTHERS IN THE LABOR FORCE

Mothers are entering the work force in increasing numbers and at an increasing rate. The greatest increases are occurring among mothers of children under 3 years of age.

More mothers in the South are working outside the home than are their non-South counterparts: according to unpublished data from the 1976 Survey of Income and Education, 48.5% vs. 40.3% for mothers of children under age 6, 55.0% vs. 49.8% for mothers of children under age 18.

Among southern mothers of pre-school-age children, higher labor force participation holds true regardless of family composition. Among two-parent families of children under age 6 in the South, 44.8% of the mothers are working outside the home compared to 38.3% in other regions. The rates and contrasts are even more dramatic for mothers heading single parent families with very young children: in the South 66.5% of these mothers are in the labor force; in the non-South 50.8% are in the labor force.

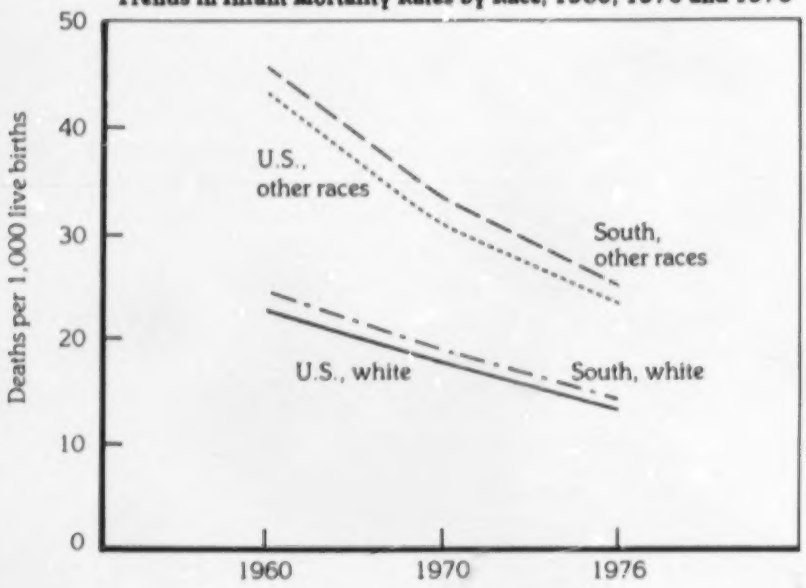
Labor Force Participation Rates for Mothers with Children Under Six, 1975



LIFE CHANCES: THE EARLY YEARS

The likelihood that a baby born in the South will die during the first year of life is greater than in the other areas of the United States, despite a trend toward decreased rates of infant death in the region. Infant mortality, measured as the number of deaths (up to one year of age) per thousand live-births was 17.8 in the South, and 15.3 in the non-South in 1975. For non-whites the difference is even more striking: 27.9 in the South compared to 21.7 in other regions.

Trends in Infant Mortality Rates by Race, 1960, 1970 and 1976



Risk associated with infant mortality such as the incidence of low birth weight (under 2500 grams) and teenage pregnancy occur with more frequency in the South.

Although special care nurseries and medical technology have significantly increased the survival rate of the very tiny infants, these babies and those born to teenage mothers remain at high risk for handicapping conditions in childhood and later in life. In fact, several estimates of the handicapped population indicate that slightly higher rates of childhood disability can be found in the South: among children aged 3-17, the Survey of Income Education (SIE) shows 6.6% for the South and 5.8% for the non-South. Special education counts of the school-age population show 1.1 million handicapped children in the South, (8.5%) and 2.4 million handicapped children in the non-South, (8%).

LEARNING IN THE SOUTH

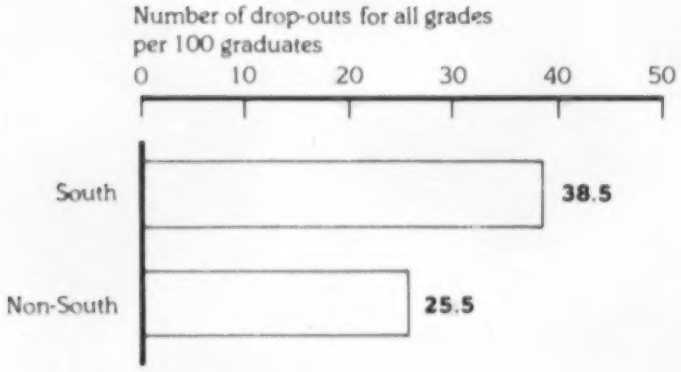
During the seventies southern students made progress in their scores on standardized achievement tests, with marked improvement in reading scores. However, the average test grades of children in the South continue to be below the national mean scores.

Another indicator of educational progress is the proportion of pupils retained in grade, those not promoted to the next grade level with others in their age group. The South stands out among the U.S. regions in the rate of students retained in grade. Over 42% of the students enrolled below their age-appropriate grade are in the South.

However, the retention-in-grade rates and the standardized achievement test scores merit careful interpretation. It is possible that both promotion policies and remedial programs vary regionally and it is difficult to determine how much these differences explain lower retention rates in other geographic areas. In addition, there is some question as to how well the standardized test performance scores correlate with acquired life skills and future success.

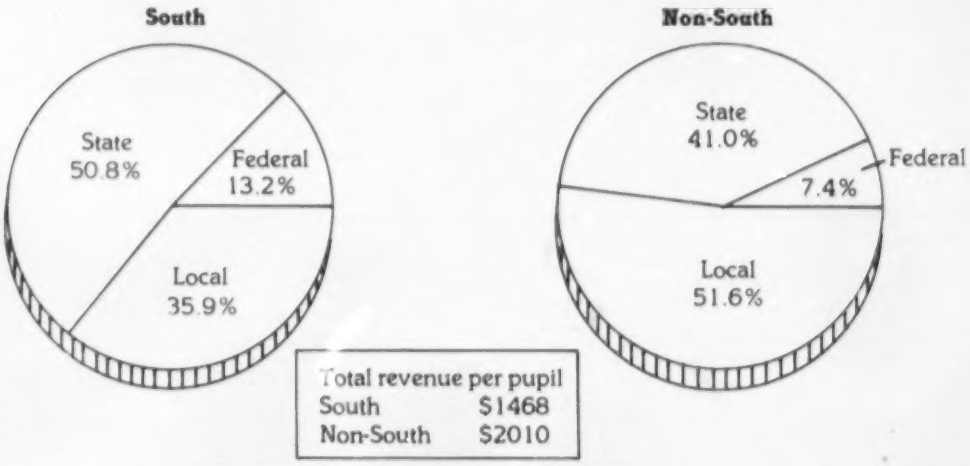
One educational measure that is clearly related to future earnings and success is graduation from high school. With regard to high school diplomas the facts indicate that southern children are at a special disadvantage in two respects. First, 42% of parents in the Census South have less than a high school education compared to 34% in the U.S. as a whole. Parental education is known to be a significant factor in the education, health and income status of children. Second, and a better reflection of today's children in the South, is the dropout rate. HEW, in an extensive survey of public schools, measured 880,000 dropouts from all grades during the 1975-76 school year. Three-hundred thousand (300,000) of these dropouts had been enrolled in the South. For every 100 high school graduates in the South there were 38.5 children who did not graduate. The non-South ratio is 25.5 dropouts per 100 secondary school graduates.

The Number of School Drop-outs Compared with Number of High School Graduates, 1976



Public education expenditures for elementary and secondary schools during the 1976-77 school year totalled over $18 billion in the South. Federal contributions to the elementary and secondary budgets were significantly higher in the South than in the non-South 13.2% and 7.4% respectively. However total per pupil expenditures were $542 less in the South than for other regions: $1,468 compared to $2,010.

Revenue per Pupil by Source, 1976-1977



PROGRAM RESOURCES: FUNDING AND UTILIZATION

We need to examine how well public resources match the characteristics of southern children. How well are we utilizing existing public programs? Our preliminary observations focus on two programs aimed at serving the neediest children: Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC); and Medicaid.

AFDC

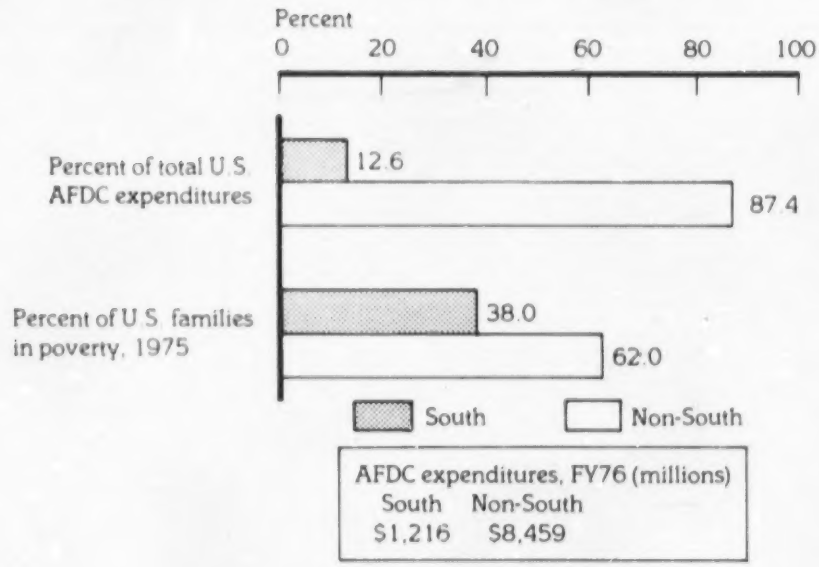
In 1975, although four million children in the South were in families living at or below the poverty level, less than two million southern children received AFDC cash benefits. Due to more liberal eligibility rules in other parts of the country the ratio of AFDC recipients to the number of poor children nationwide is much higher: eight million AFDC children among 10 million poor children.

Because AFDC benefit levels established by states in the South are low (almost one half the average U.S. levels) the maximum AFDC and Food Stamp benefit package is correspondingly low in southern states compared to the U.S. median. However, the federal share of that combined benefit package ranges from 70% to 96%.

In September 1977 the average monthly benefit under AFDC for a child was $58 in the South, $127 in the non-South.

These rough comparative figures indicate that a poor child in the South is less likely to receive income assistance than a poor child in other parts of the country. Indeed, many poor children in the South do not receive cash benefits. However the complexity of the AFDC eligibility criteria and the many state variations in AFDC policy make it very difficult to calculate a true participation rate for this program. In addition, regional differences in the attitudes of poor people toward accepting public assistance may explain at least part of the apparent low enrollment in the South.

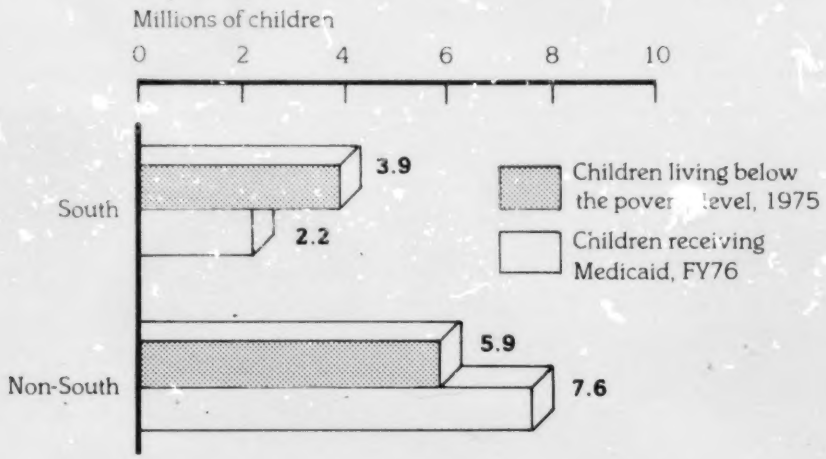
AFDC Expenditures by Source, 1976



Medicaid

While 40% of the nation's poor children live in the South only 22% of medicaid recipient children live in the South. Only about half of the children living below the poverty level in southern states received Medicaid benefits in 1976. Statistics show that the number of the nation's children of the Medicaid rolls was 9.8 million or close to the total number of poor children; but some children technically above the poverty line receive Medicaid benefits, because of placement in certain institutions, because of disability or in cases of extremely high medical expenses.

The Number of Children Receiving Medicaid in 1976 in Contrast to the Number of Poor Children in 1975



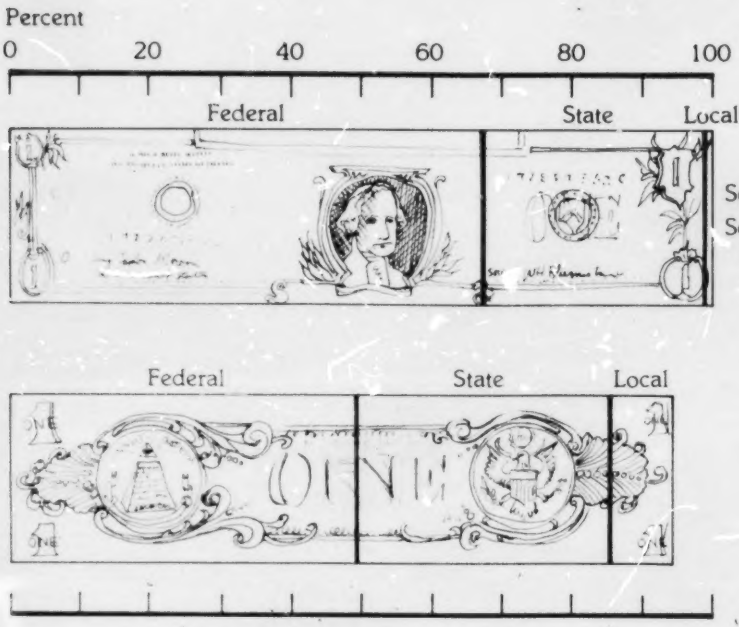
Nationally 92% of Medicaid recipient children also receive a cash AFDC payment; in the South 82% of Medicaid children receive a cash payment.

	U.S.	South	South as % of U.S.
Poor Children — 1975	9,867,000	3,997,000	41%
Medicaid recipient children 1976	9,849,000	2,158,000	22%
Medicaid children with AFDC cash grants — 1976	9,129,000	1,778,000	19%

In 1976, Medicaid expenditures for children (under age 21) in the South totalled $462,249,000 or 17.8% of the region's total Medicaid expenditures. In 12 southern states the average Medicaid expenditures for children are significantly lower than the U.S. average payment of $240 per year. The federal government paid 67% of the South's Medicaid bill compared to 49.2% of the total non-South Medicaid tab.

The Medicaid data, like the AFDC data, indicates comparatively low benefit levels in the South and a lower probability that a poor child in the South will receive assistance. However the data is subject to the same reservations concerning precision and the failure to take into account regional differences in attitudes.

Medicaid Expenditures by Source, 1976



South's budget = 18.5% U.S. budget
South received 23.8% U.S. funds

	Total payments ($ millions)
South	2,770.3
Non-South	12,215.6

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

The preceding sections answer some of our questions about children in the South. Many questions remain unanswered. Nationwide nutrition, growth, and development surveys give a picture of children in the U.S. but the samples are too small to provide useful information at the regional level. Without uniform reporting and verification procedures existing data about child abuse is not reliable. Very little data is available on youthful offenders, particularly runaways, truants and other status offenders. The number of arrests is known, but adjudication is not centrally reported. School districts do not share common definitions of suspensions and uniform comparable data does not exist. Reliable measures of mental health problems are elusive for a region-wide population of young people. Inventories of community recreation opportunities that could be aggregated for this multi-state area are lacking as are any standardized indicators of quality of life and cultural strengths.

Many of these data gaps may be amenable to change and refinement to produce better, more uniform and reliable information. Some of our questions, in fact, may not be answerable by standard yardsticks, but require us to venture into new dimensions of impressionistic and experiential reporting. In the coming months the Southern Growth Policies Board will explore ways to answer these questions. Additional reports to be issued in 1980 will provide a more detailed statistical picture and will focus on the qualitative aspects not captured by standard data sources such as: the attitudes of children and parents about

growing up in the South today; the strength of family and community ties; the quality of the environment; and the importance of the southern cultural tradition.

CONCLUSION

This preliminary report highlights some unique characteristics of southern children in comparison to children in other parts of the country. We recognize that southern children also share some traits and problems common to children nationally — problems that pose challenges to policy makers regardless of geographic region. We are concerned about the special needs of handicapped children; migrant and immigrant children; abused children; delinquent children; and children living out of their homes, especially those lost in foster care; children with alcohol and drug problems, bilingual children as well as gifted and talented children. Although we do not deal with these subgroups of children in this report we do not minimize the need to find better public responses to their situations.

Southern children, a large portion of the Region's total population, represent a special opportunity for investment in the future. They will present significant demands for basic public services in the 1980's. Our ability to respond to the unique needs of children in the South is a major challenge facing both the public and private sectors. Although these initial observations point to encouraging and improving trends, serious problems have been identified as well. As a beginning step, SGPB will continue to develop baseline data useful to the states and to the region in evaluating existing programs, in setting priorities and planning future program aid in better matching public policies and resources to the characteristics of southern children.

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Task Force on the
Status of Children in the South

Critical to both the collection and analysis of data is the Task Force on the Status of Children in the South. This group, comprised of one Governor appointed representative from each state, has met twice in the early stages of this project, and is currently obtaining state level data. The Task Force will in the coming months formulate policy options for the SGPB in the area of programs for children.

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Georgia:	Candace Brown
Kentucky:	Peter Conn, Steve Fox
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